

Diasporic Dimensions: A Comparative Study of Damodar Mauzo's *Karmelin* And Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*

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Abstract: The present paper is a modest attempt to compare the trauma of displacement faced by the women protagonists of Damodar Mauzo's *Karmelin* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*. Damodar Mauzo, a significant Konkani novelist unfolds the tragic life of *Karmelin* in his novel. He focuses on the tragic theme of Diaspora in *Karmelin* and derives its strength from the regional Goan identity. The study of these two novels provides meaningful variations on the diasporic theme.

Keywords: Diaspora, Bharati Mukherjee, *Wife*, Damodar Mauzo.

The present paper is a modest attempt to compare the trauma of displacement faced by women protagonists of Damodar Mauzo's *Karmelin* and Bharati Mukherjee's *Wife*. *Karmelin*, the protagonist represents many Goan migrants going to the Gulf countries and Dimple, the protagonist of *Wife* represents the transition of Bengali woman from the relatively close society to relatively open multicultural permissive society of America. The main contention of the paper is however offered in terms of the theory of diaspora. It is argued that *Karmelin* (2004) and *Wife* (1975) provide the substantial and meaningful variations on the diasporic theme and that these variations on the part of regional creative sensibility provide the alternatives to the current Indian English Diaspora fiction. The first section of the paper discusses the theory of diaspora, where as second and third sections provide analysis of the selected novels by using diasporic framework, while last section concerns with comparative perspective.

As has been said earlier, this paper is an attempt to explore the dilemmas of displacement as faced by *Karmelin*; and Dimple. As diaspora is about migration, about transmuting realities and transforming one's sense of identity, it is necessary to discuss the theory of diaspora in Indian English literature in general and *Karmelin* and *Wife* in particular. The origin of the Indian diaspora goes back to 19th century during the colonial period. It is one of the byproducts of colonization. All colonial masters found Indians skillfull, usefull, hard working, and as a result Indian labour is transported by British, French, Dutch and the Portuguese masters. Some migrate in search of the better opportunities in Gulf countries. Some educated elites of India who seeks economic betterment in the more advanced countries of the world. Both the Indian blue collar workers as well as professionals are well placed in the Arab world. There are various instances of economic, cultural, and political diasporas. These diasporic experiences of migration for various causes have

animated much recent Postcolonial Literatures. The literature produced by diaspora writers such as Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry and Salman Rushdie has proved immensely popular in Western along with Eastern literary criticism. It must however be remembered that the focus of most of these diaspora writers and critics is on the international notion of culture. A major example is found in Bhabha. In *The Location of Culture* Bhabha writes: living at the border, at the edge requires a 'new art of the present'. This depends upon embracing the contrary logic of the border and using it to rethink the dominant ways we represent things like history, identity, and community. Borders are important thresholds, full of contradictions and ambivalence. They both separate and join places. Bhabha defines 'the beyond' as an 'in-between' site of transition:

... the beyond is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past... we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity. Past and present inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. (Bhabha: 1.)

This space of the 'in-between' becomes rethought as a place of immense creativity and possibility in Kureishi's essay *The Rainbow Sign*. Kureishi's essay adds new perception to the contemporary theory of Diaspora. Cultures travel, take root or get dislocated and individuals internalize nostalgia and experience memories of past. Homi Bhabha shifts the focus from nationhood to culture in his *Nation and Narration*. The present paper focuses on the various diasporic dimensions posed in the selected novels. Damodar Mauzo, a leading Konkani novelist, short story writer, film script writer is the recipient of Katha Award for creative fiction. He won Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel *Karmelin*. The novel unfolds the tragic life of Karmelin. Her tragedy begins right from her birth in the utter poverty of her family. Even at her tender age, Karmelin has to bear the sorrow of her dearest brother, Francisco's death. Typhoid has taken hold of the whole village, Suravali and Karmelin's parents also pass away. After that she is uprooted from one spot and is transplanted in her father's sister Fernanda's house. "A new village, new home, new people all around! Karmelin shrank into herself." (Mauzo: 33). Karmelin is emotionally supported by her uncle, Joao Philip. There is an end to Karmelin's happiest youthful days with Joao's illness and Agnel's marriage to a girl from a rich family. Agnel deceives her and on the other hand she is held responsible for Paai's illness. She accepts marriage as the only solution to get out of the mess created and accepts the reality of life. After marriage, tensions are created in the marital relationship due to lack of the communication and economic problems. Jose's drunken stupor throws him out of job. But he plays the role of husband every night and that disturbs her. Departing from her uncle's house, again she is deprived of love in her in-law's house. She is relocated in the emotional anchor of Isabel Jose's brother's wife. After her daughter Belinda's birth, she tries to make every effort to mend her relationship with Jose and also to improve the financial status. Further

the implementation of new laws regarding tenants and landowners after the liberation of Goa disturbs Karmelin's life. She has to lose the house in which she has stayed all these years. The family fortunes have changed for the worse. To escape from this financial burden of the family, she accepts the alternative of going to Kuwait. All sorts of thoughts bustle in her mind. A deep voice within her says, Stop acting so moralistic, Karmelin. Are you so pure and unsullied that you're worried about your virtue still? (Mauzo: 204). Karmelin with all her adjustment comes to Kuwait. Her displacement in the land of Arabs is fraught the dream of future. Kuwait becomes a dream for Karmelin. It was like a dream in which she had been transported to this strange place. (Mauzo: 217). She feels like a stranger for some days. But she gets used to her new surroundings. The space provides new possibilities for her. She learns enough Arabic words so that she can manage the kitchen. She is enjoying weaving the dreams of bright future and is suddenly trapped in the snares of her Arab master, Nissar. She has heard about the stories of Arab men but Nissar seems to be different. She accepts the money offered by him and reflects. It was good money and he had given it out of his own free will, so what if she had slept with him for money..... She had come here to make money . . . hadn't she? (Mauzo: 2004, p. 222). She accepts all this as she wants to weave the fabric of Belinda, her daughter's bright future. Perhaps the emotional need is also another reason as Jose fails in his role, Agnel deceives her, and Rosario ruins her. Karmelin's first visit to Goa from her dreamland Kuwait gives a sense of pleasure at the beginning. But after Belinda's matriculation examination when she hears the words of her daughter, all the dreams of Karmelin are shattered. Karmelin's reaction at the end of the novel to Belinda's words I'll get a passport made and then I'll go to Kuwait like you – I'll earn money, just like you did (Mauzo: 281) is very significant because it brings out the cyclical nature of the tragic narrative. Bharati Mukherjee, a great diasporic novelist was born in Calcutta in 1940 and grew up in a wealthy traditional family. She attended the Universities of Calcutta and Baroda. She went to America in 1961 and married a Canadian author Clark Blase in 1963 and went to Canada in the mid-1960s. She became a naturalized citizen of Canada in 1972. Her works like *Jasmine*, *Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife* depict the predicament of a woman caught in two cultures. *Wife* (1975) is a novel about the predicament of an Indian wife trapped between two different value systems in a foreign country. The novel depicts the Bengali families living in America. This shifting of the families from Bengal to America is because of their craze for material prosperity and also the impact of globalized culture. They become members of the newly-found Indian-American Society in America. The novel presents the transition of the middle-class Bengali woman from the relatively close society to relatively open multicultural permissive society. The novelists also explores the possibilities available to men and women who reach foreign lands through their necessity or voluntarily. The novel tells the story of Dimple Dasgupta, a woman from Calcutta's middle-class. It is a typical class that values docility and submissiveness in women. She dutifully marries Amit Basu, an engineer who plans to go to the United States. Finally in New

York, she finds the limitation of her heritage. The feeling of an outsider and her native heritage confuses her and she ultimately finds the expression for her frustration. The protagonist Dimple is neither typically 'Indian' nor exotically 'westernized'. She is essentially human and basically feminine in her sensibility. She desires for a different kind of life. Before her marriage with Amit Basu, she, as a young girl of 'twenties, fantasizes about young men with mustaches, dressed in spotless white. According to Dimple, marriage would bring her freedom. She fantasizes about the cocktail parties on carpeted lawns, fund-raising dinners for noble charities after marriages. She thinks marriage would bring her love (p.3). As an adolescent girl, she is not aware of the realities. She indulges in the fantasies.

After marriage, Dimple has to adjust a lot like a typical Indian wife. Her arrival with her husband in America, she has to face different problems. Amit struggles a lot for getting a job and finally gets the job of a boiler maintenance man. His degradation from a consultant engineer to a boiler maintenance man frustrates him. "Life had held out such promises but was so slow to deliver" (Mukherjee: 104). In Bengal, Dimple had experienced Amit in terms of permissions and restraints. But in America, Amit seems to have collapsed inwardly, 'to have grown frail and shabby' (Mukherjee: 88). Dimple feels it is cruel of him to make her tiny promises of a new life and then withhold the details. She wants, Amit to be infallible, intractable, Godlike, but with boyish charm, wants him to find a job, so that after a decent number of years, he could take his savings and retire with her to a three-storey house in Ballygunje Park (Mukherjee:88). Thus, the aspirations of Dimple are like those of other women characters, to accompany their husbands to America and return to India as a 'rich wife'. Amit and Dimple have to face many problems in America. Amit does not fulfill her fantasy life. He is merely the provider of small material comforts. Dimple has a bitter experience of marriage and thinks that the marriage has betrayed her, has not provided all the glittery things she had imagined, has not brought her cocktails under canopied skies. The novelist depicts another family that of Jyoti Sen, a Chemical Engineer, who also comes to America with his wife Meena. Meena tries to fulfill the expectations of her husband and is content in playing her role as a housewife. Amit Basu lives in the house of Jyoti at the beginning. To quote Meena, 'I am going to retire when I am 40, go back and build a five lakh house and become the Maharaja of Lower Circular Road in Calcutta'. Meena seems to be happy with her marriage with Jyoti. She is very traditional. She expects the same role for her daughter. Mrs. Chakaldar and Mrs. Meena Sen are of the same type; they are all planning to go home when their husbands retire. They wish for the bright materialistic future after their return from America. Compared to all these wives, Dimple seems to be a frustrated wife. Her consciousness is different from other wives. She also aspires for material pleasures but she needs a sense of freedom.

Dimple's relationship with Milt Glasser, a foreigner, shows the sense of freedom she is trying to achieve. She is not ready to take any risk in developing this relationship further. There is a moral confusion in

Dimple's mind. She tries to fulfill her desires by indulging only in fantasies. Her decision to walk on the road in Marsha's silk shirt and Amit's trousers reveals a sort of release she gets from the closed value structure of her native country. Through the pressures of two cultures, 'rationality' snaps. Dimple tries pitifully to pull through an affair with Milt Glasser, a white American. She endeavours for liberation by falling in love with Milt and ends the affair in madness. These tensions of adaptation and assimilation hamper the interpersonal relationships and ultimately, the family. In this context, Dimple's confrontation with a multicultural society is an important aspect of the novel. Mukherjee does not impose readymade solutions to the problems facing these new communities in America. She prefers showing them gradually acquiring power in order to control their fates. Degrees of freedom Dimple desires to achieve are revealed in the novel. Dimple feels suffocated in a foreign land. It is argued that both *Karmelin* and *Wife* presenting different dimensions of diaspora, significantly contribute to the post-colonial literatures in India. In what way is diaspora in *Karmelin* different from the diaspora in Mukherjee's *Wife* and the works of Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and other such writers in Indian English fiction? The answer is that the diaspora of these writers is located in a highly elitist, metropolitan, and international idea of culture. Regionality which has been integral part of Indian literature in various languages has absolutely no creative space here. In contrast to this, the tragic theme of diaspora in *Karmelin*, derives its strength from the regional Goan identity. In a sense, it is not the tragedy of an individual only. It is also indirectly a collective tragedy, that is, the tragedy of a region specific Goan lower class community represented Karmelin. This community is forced by history to undergo the travails of socio-economic change and the consequent struggle for survival. There is one more significant difference. Diaspora theory in the context of Indian English fiction is essentially writer oriented. In other words it always refers to and privileges the positioning and location of the writer, on the margins of culture in an international context. Bharati Mukherjee, Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry and Amitav Ghosh are important examples of diaspora because as writers they are differently located. Thus differential location itself constitutes their identity as writers. By contrast, Mauzo has not experienced such diasporic experiences but he has likened it to the experiences of Goan Lower Class Community. In Mauzo's *Karmelin* the focus is not on the diaspora of the writer. Obviously Mauzo is located in the tradition of Goan culture and Konkani language. The strength of the novel therefore lies in its focus on the diaspora of the characters, of people trapped in their desperate struggle for survival, of a helpless, marginalized woman, like Karmelin. In Mauzo's novel, diaspora is not writer oriented. It is character oriented. In this sense, we can certainly maintain that Mauzo's *Karmelin* reaches out to the wider horizons of contemporary Indian fiction redefines the diaspora theme in regional, geo-cultural terms and thereby subverts in an unconscious manner the diaspora theory which has become both prestigious and fashionable in our discussion of contemporary Indian fiction. However, the character of Dimple from

Mukherjee's *Wife* represents the society which is caught in the vortex of globalization. She glimpses the possible relationship through Milt. But she cannot sustain through the moral dilemma. Mukherjee tries to show that her socio-cultural conditioning prevents her from achieving a sense of freedom, individuality, and autonomy. She remains unadapted to her new environment. It is the tragedy of a woman trapped between two family value systems. Thus, the moral confusion created gives rise to frustration. Dimple's aspirations are crushed by cultural interventions. Mukherjee's Dimple aspires for material pleasure and a sense of freedom. Her displacement is deliberate for materially better life while Karmelin's displacement is for the survival and the better future of her daughter. Thus, these novels present the conflict between the forces of two different traditions. In *Karmelin*, we find the conflict between Goan and Arab traditions and Christian and Muslim cultures while in *Wife* there is conflict between Indian and American cultures and Eastern and Western traditions.

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- All quotations cited with page numbers in this paper have been taken from Damodar Mauzo, *Karmelin* trans. Vidya Pai (2004), Sahitya Akademi.



Incomplete Memories

- Jasmine Anand

Memories of touch
 Memories of body
 Remain inert
 incomprehensible, cold, excruciating, half baked...
 Are nameless, illogical illusions!
 Because the head was never there.
 This mad dance of incompleteness:
 plays upon amnesiac nostalgia.
 Memories of mind
 Forget, select, mould
 Making them logically complete;
 With an unreliable license
 of flashing back
 on broken images lacking
 Appetite.

